



Summary of Comments

An Overview

In December, the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests asked people for information and ideas regarding management of the Nez Perce and Clearwater Forests.

Your response was impressive: 11,018 replies including letters, messages, comment forms and petitions poured in by e-mail, fax and traditional mail.

Managing this deluge was an enormous task. Each response received a unique number for tracking purposes. Multiple copies were made for filing and coding.

Two things quickly became apparent during mail processing: (1) many individuals submitted letters more than once and (2) there were five organized letter-writing campaigns whereby people sent in comments with identical, or nearly identical, content. These submissions were classified as “form” letters.



Content Analysis

What was done with all those comments? The short answer: content analysis.

During content analysis all responses are read multiple times. Substantive comments are identified and coded by topic. These

comments are entered into a database verbatim.

Why is this process necessary? It is a way to organize and summarize 11,018 individual responses (44 3½-inch binders) into an organized, comprehensive 368-page report. This information helps decision-makers identify issues and a variety of management options.

What Did People Say?

Tribal Concerns

The Nez Perce and Coeur d’Alene Tribes maintain a unique relationship requiring government-to-government coordination and consultation with the Forest Service.

The Nez Perce Tribe expressed concern about protection for treaty-reserved resources. They requested a revision topic specific to tribal uses and co-management.

In addition, they expressed concerns about water quality, fisheries, wildlife and the management of cultural areas.

Decision-making Processes

Respondents had a variety of desires regarding forest plans. Some wanted strategic, flexible direction, while others preferred strong direction and measurable standards.

Many expressed skepticism. Some did not believe public input would be considered; others believed the agency had already made up its mind regarding management of the forests.

A variety of land management philosophies were touted. The two most commonly mentioned were preservation and multiple-use emphases. Most agreed on the agency’s proposal to focus on ecosystem health.

By the Numbers

The revision team received:

- 11,018 responses
- 7,110 duplicate responses
- 3,908 individual responses
- 3,608 form letters
- 289 original letters
- 11 petitions

Responses originated in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

The revision team received 226 responses from Idaho, with 182 of those coming from what has been defined as the local five-county area (Clearwater, Idaho, Latah, Lewis and Nez Perce Counties).

The high number of duplicate responses is attributed to two factors: (1) individuals wanted to ensure their submission arrived so they sent it by multiple methods and (2) some perceived their input would be treated as a “vote” so it was better to send it multiple times.

What Did People Say? (cont.)

Forest Plan Revision Documents

The planning rule was on many commenters' minds. Some encouraged the forests to revise under the 1982 planning rule to ensure adequate environmental analysis. Others forcefully argued the agency should adopt the recently-approved 2005 rule as a way to eliminate "analysis paralysis."

Many offered ideas regarding standards and guidelines. Again, respondents were divided with some urging the adoption of strict standards and others calling for flexibility.

Natural Resources Management

People desire protection for the forests' resources, especially fish and wildlife. They disagree about how forests should be protected: through active management or through exclusion of management.

While people agreed weeds were a problem, they disagreed about treatment methods.

Fire was a "hot" topic. While many preferred fire as a management tool, others did not want it used until timber harvest had occurred.

People were divided regarding the use of timber harvest as a management tool in national forests and where timber harvest should occur.

Transportation System Management

People had a variety of concerns about the forests' transportation systems.

Some believed the systems were too extensive and too costly to maintain. They advocated for reductions in miles of roads and trails.

Others believed too many roads and trails had already been closed. They requested an inventory of existing roads and trails, including user-created routes, before transportation plans were developed.

Recreation Management

Most commenters acknowledged recreation is increasing on national forests. That prompted concerns about impacts to the land and user conflicts.

Some respondents desired more motorized access. In addition to providing recreation opportunities, they viewed access as key to fire suppression and forest health.

Others pushed for restrictions on motorized recreation. They cited on-the-ground impacts and noise as negative consequences.

User conflicts were discussed extensively. Some insisted the agency deal with the conflicts; others hadn't experienced user conflicts and believed the issue was hyperbole. Many provided ideas about how to minimize problems.

Lands and Special Designations

Respondents had very different views about the worth of lands that had special designations (e.g., wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, etc.).

On one hand individuals valued large tracts of undeveloped land, believing a designation such as "wilderness" enhanced its worth.

Others disliked special designations believing the restrictions that often accompany them create adverse social and economic impacts.

Many site-specific recommendations were provided for wilderness, wild and scenic river and research natural area additions. Others requested the agency recommend no additional lands for special designations.

Social and Economic Values

Many commenters pointed out the importance of these two national forests for their social and economic values to the public in general, and to local communities.

Some local respondents reminded the agency of the importance of activities such as timber harvest and recreation opportunities to local communities. They asked the forests to evaluate the impacts of decisions made in forest plans to local economies.

Others believed the forests' contributions to local economies should be a quality environment.

Some requested that the agency consider the value of amenities in the economic analysis.

Get More Information

The full report is available on the forest plan revision website: www.fs.fed.us/cnpz. It is posted under the "Documents" section.

Paper copies of the full report can also be reviewed at all Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forest offices.

Copies of the 10-page executive summary or the full document are available upon request.